Reflections on Biography, written by the author of an award-winning life of Daniel Defoe, is an invitation to turn 'biography' over in the mind as we turn an artefact in our hands. Intended for all readers of biography—lifelong or occasional, critical or casual—it examines the subject from many angles, and gives a tour of the decisions biographers make and the implications of those choices. Its aim is to increase the pleasure of reading biographies, to add new, enjoyable dimensions even as it increases readers' insights into the art of writing them. Among the biographies given special attention are prize-winning lives of writers, mathematical geniuses, intellectual women, the Roosevelts, and unusual marriage partners. The book is full of lively comparisons, for instance, of Keats by Walter Jackson Bate, Andrew Motion, and others, and of a century of biographies of Edith Wharton. The opening chapters are on the four decisions most influential in shaping the biography and the reader's experience. The first concerns the biographer's voice, because this is the invisible bridge between biographer and reader and between reader and subject; examination of this also shows how things are hidden from the ordinary reader of biography. The other decisions are about choosing the subject; evidence; and theories of personality. The remaining chapters cover multiple forms of biography, consider additional choices in the differing contexts of work by feminist, British professional, and African-American biographers, and look towards the form's future directions and challenges.

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